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INTERIOR DECORATION IN AMERICA

by *Walter Paris*

THE foremost of all the arts is Decoration, whether it be sculpture or painting; and fully realizing the responsibilities imposed upon present-day workers, I make an earnest appeal for more men. More particularly do I address those men qualified by native ability and training to fulfill the artistic obligation. I invite the attention of the men now studying in Paris and elsewhere, to the splendid opportunities offered in this line of work. Concerted action on the part of a few new men—acting temporarily, perhaps, under the guidance of the one or two now in the field and acquainted with the needs thereof—will lead to the recognition in the near future of the profession of the Decorative Architect.

There is a world of charm in Decoration, which draws to its practice all classes of people, but in consequence of the commercial spirit of the Americans every branch of the art in this country has what has been termed the "commercial ring," and that of decorative architecture is in no sense free from it. Few men practice it in the professional capacity, but many are trading in it. The list of decorators of New York, or of any other large city of this country, reveals a line of successful cabinet-makers, house painters, and upholstery salesmen—even the names of an ex-actress and of a former governess are noted. Perhaps the good Lord intended that they one and all should be decorators, but many have been called, and very few are of the chosen. I feel convinced that the great majority now in the trade have been drawn to it by the "big money" in it, and not by reason of their artistic spirit.

In consequence of the curious types of persons now doing decoration in this country, the work has fallen into ill-repute, and the idea justly prevails that decorative art is a refuge for the incompetent. With but few exceptions the

decoration of our houses has been done by the tradesman, the dealer in furniture and draperies, by men who have the stores with gorgeous show windows, or "studios" where clients are entertained by clever salespeople, apt and proficient in bewildering the *ingénue* with stage settings and theatrical effects.

Regulations should be enacted governing the conditions under which a man could become a decorator, and no one should be allowed to assume the title unless fully qualified. The decorator should be, primarily, an artist, a gentleman, and a man of affairs. The profession of decorative architecture differs from that of constructive architecture, in that the former demands that the man be first, foremost and always, an artist—a worker in colors, in wood, and in plaster; a man who understands how to combine various substances in order to produce both harmony and contrast of surfaces; a man who has such an extensive knowledge of the several mediums, and such a thorough grasp on his technical means, as will enable him to arrive at the highest form of expression. The decorator should have an all-round knowledge of the details and of the workmanship of a piece of work, and a sense of style that cannot be questioned. He should not bend to the wishes of those who do not understand his work, but must at all times be independent of spirit, and of a sound influence on his clients.

The interior of the average residence of New York bears sufficient evidence to warrant condemnation of the entire profession as it is to-day. We find in the regulation twenty-five foot house Pompeian Halls, Louis Drawing Rooms, Adams Music Rooms, and Gothic Dining and Smoking Rooms; their walls covered with silks, and their ceilings glistening with wedding-cake icing—all lacking in individuality, all entirely unsuited to present day needs, and all most decidedly un-

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American. The grand rooms of the palaces in France are splendid inspirations—for Frenchmen; but they are totally unfitted to the money-mad aristocracy of this country. Plain doors, mantels and wood-work may not suggest sufficient richness or expense to the mind of the modern decorator, but if we who are interested in the uplifting of the profession keep continually urging and forcing simplicity in this direction, our homes in time will become less gorgeous but more refined, and a great deal more livable.

Varying opinions on matters of importance will ever exist even among men of strong minds, and it is curious to note how many men will fight for their own creed and condemn all others. This conflict of many ideas arises from uncertain, non-positive knowledge. Especially is this true as regards decorative art. Decorators of to-day are no better as a class than those of the days of "bedstead architecture," even those who rank among the highest, in popular opinion—those with some of the largest shop windows. They have no right to consideration as serious workers, for they are not gifted with special ability, nor are they capable of producing the greater things of art.

The result is that at the present day the constructive architect has to decide questions that should have the earnest attention of a trained colorist and decorator. It is a problem for him, that he has to perform the functions of the artist-architect, the importance of whose work he only too well appreciates, as is evidenced by the commission he charges, which is four times that demanded for pure construction work. But the feeling is that the tradesman in the field of decorating must be disposed of at any cost.

The client of to-day is gradually causing a great revival of better and higher ideals in decoration, for he is beginning to seek for quality in method and execution, and he is demanding that the men to whom he gives his commissions for work be possessed of faculties to which the vendor of popular art cannot lay claim.

The larger architectural offices are trying to meet these demands by engaging men who render sketches of interiors, and plan furniture and fixtures. But my experience as a builder of furniture has shown me that working drawings of furniture from an architect's office are not practical—the chairs cannot be sat upon when constructed, the tables will not hold together, and in the case of the larger pieces most grotesque results are obtained.

Then architects' decorative schemes are usually devoid of the qualities of harmony, pleasing contrast, and appropriateness. Oftentimes the constructor is not acquainted with the attempts of former adventurers, and he often so overrates his ability that he mistakes his trifling flights and excursions for discoveries of real value; in fact, old forms familiar to the regular worker are seized upon by him as occasions for personal congratulations. The architectural details may be beyond criticism, but there are few, if indeed any architects, who are familiar with the manner of handling the artifices of contrast, such as glazing, and other expedients by which the artist-decorator raises the value of his colors.

The average architect realizes that he is not capable of meeting all demands in this new work, and he would very gladly welcome the appearance of the scholarly decorator. It would relieve him of an immense burden which he constantly encounters in connection with the interior of his houses. At present he fears to turn over his client to a "decorator," for the merchant-decorator does not hesitate to appropriate the client to his own needs, even at the expense of sacrificing the architect, by accepting architectural commissions, for he is not bound by any professional etiquette.

The average American is so busy that he forgets very quickly. Less than twenty years ago the architect in this country was an unknown quantity, save in the office of the builder, where he occupied the position of draughtsman. In those days

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the builder-contractor was the "king of the job," but today scholarly intelligence is reigning supreme. With the advantages of education and intellect, the architect has seen the possibilities of the situation, till he now controls the entire proposition, from the laying of the foundation to the selection of the furniture and the fixtures. He is not always an artist, however, and he needs the collaboration of the trained

decorator, the colorist and the sculptor.

If such a change can take place in architecture, why cannot a corresponding advance take place in decoration? Let us do away with the decorator, and put him in his relatively right place, that of cabinet-maker, upholsterer, house painter, and vendor of popular art. Then, and then only, will arise a new profession, that of the Decorative Architect.

PICTURE SALES

THE following account of the prices brought at the famous Koenigs-warter Sale, held in Berlin on the 20th of November, contains the figures above the \$300 value. The numbers of the catalogue are given:

1. Ludolf Backhuysen: "Marine".....	\$730	28. Greuze: "Young Girl".....	2,275
3. T. A. Berckheyde: "Marketplace at Cologne".....	650	29. F. Guardi: "View of the Grand Canal, Venice".....	1,225
4. Joh. Both: "Italian Landscape, Evening".....	675	30. F. Guardi: "Santa-Maria della Salute, Venice".....	1,850
5. Paulus Brill: "Picnic".....	425	31. F. Guardi: "Grand Canal During a Fete".....	2,500
6. Bonzino: "Portrait of a Young Man".....	775	32. F. Guardi: "View of the Piazzetta".....	875
7. Breughel (Velvet): "The Forge of Vulcan".....	1,375	33. F. Guardi: "View of the Grand Canal".....	1,625
8. Canaletto: "View of the Piazzetta"..... [Bought by the Kaiser-Friedrich Museum of Berlin.]	8,125	34. Frans Hals: "Portrait of a Gentleman".....	7,225
9. Joost Van Craesbeck: "Flemish Peasant Wedding".....	1,950	35. A. Hanneman: "Portrait of a Lady".....	775
11. Albert Cuyp: "Landscape with Cattle".....	18,000	36. W. de Heusch: "Return from the Chase".....	875
12. Balthasar Denner: "Portrait of an Old Man".....	650	37. Jani van der Heyden: "View of a Castle with Park".....	8,000
13. A. Van Dyck: "Portrait of a Gentleman".....	14,000	38. Hobbema: "Cottage by the Road"..... [Bought by the Museum of Budapest.]	10,500
14. A. Van Dyck: "Portrait of a Gentleman".....	12,250	39. Hobbema: "The Church at Brederode".....	5,625
15. A. Van Dyck: "Portrait of Gaspar de Crayer".....	1,625	40. Hobbema: "Ruins at the Waterside".....	11,500
16. A. Van Dyck: "Portrait of Adam de Coster".....	1,775	41. Dutch School: "Portrait of a Young Man".....	1,250
19. Corn. Dusart: "Kirmess in a Dutch Village".....	1,750	42. Dutch School: "Portrait of a Cavalier".....	600
20. A. Van Everdingen: "Interior of a Forest".....	5,625	43. Dutch School: "Merwede, near Dordrecht".....	1,000
21. Govert Flinck: "Portrait of a Young Girl".....	750	44. Pieter de Hooch: "The Duet".....	450
22. French School: "Jupiter as a Boy in the Isle of Crete".....	1,400	45. J. Hopchner: "Portrait of a Lady".....	5,500
24. Claude Lorraine: "Italian Landscape".....	3,800	47. Th. de Keyser: "Portrait of a Burgher".....	3,000
25. Jan van Goyen: "View of a City near a Canal".....	1,750	48. S. de Koninck: "The Old Philosopher".....	3,525
26. Jan van Goyen: "Dutch Landscape"..... [Bought by the Museum of Elberfeld]	2,225	50. J. van der Lamen: "The Parable of the Prodigal Son".....	900
27. Barent Graat: "A Family".....	3,250	51. N. Lancret: "The Dance Outdoors".....	17,750
		52. N. Largilliére: "Portrait of a Lady".....	500
		53. L. da Pordenone: "Portrait of a Venetian Patrician".....	600
		54. J. Lingelbach: "Rest by the roadside".....	2,775
		55. N. Maes: "Portrait of a Woman".....	1,200
		56. N. Maes: "Portrait of an Old Woman".....	1,175
		57. A. Mengs: "Self Portrait".....	775
		58. F. van Mieris: "The Cavalier in the Shop".....	6,500
		59. F. Van Mieris: "Portrait of the Artist v. d. Werff in Youth".....	1,275